

**[Tom H. McNelly]**

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Words

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by

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232 Pioneer Experiences. UVALDE COUNTY, DISTRICT #10

TOM H. McNELLY

Uvalde Texas

With a telephone by his bedside, Tom McNelly has not lost touch with his home town, but rather keeps abreast of times as thoroughly as the up-and-going. Having been confined to his bed continuously for the past three years, he finds life rather interesting and talks with candor and enjoyment of the old days when he first came to Uvalde.

"I guess we are Irish for my mother said we came from Ireland and it took three weeks to make the voyage across the water. They settled in Virginia where I was born. My birth date was December 13, 1858. I don't remember the trip to Texas for I was only two or three years old when they decided to move west. But my family took a boat at New Orleans, leaving my father at the mouth of Red River to bring the five or six-hundred head of sheep across country to our new home. We came on around by boat to Galveston and then up

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to Houston where we took ox-wagons for Lavaca County. We got there by the time my father did. We settled within about eight miles of Nallettsville and there is where I learned to handle sheep.

"Herding sheep became second nature to me. I was red-headed, bare-footed, had plenty of freckles and never owned a pair of shoes till I was nine years old. Well, I didn't need any and after a kid goes barefoot a long time, shoes really are hard to wear. Of course we were proud of our shoes in those days for we didn't get a pair very often.

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"By the time I was twelve years old, I could shear sheep and I soon went to shearing whole flocks. I got five cents a head for shearing sheep. Yes, it was hard to work with hand shears. The wool was thick and greasy and our sheep always had heavy fleeces. I remember that two Jews came there afoot once to buy our wool. We rounded up the sheep and the Jews parted the wool on their backs and offered us forty-five cents a pound for it. That was an unheard-of price then. We went up to Old Man Chancey Shepherd's place and asked him about it. We had his sheep on the shares and he said he believed he'd take it. Well, they paid that price for it and we delivered the wool after we sheared, receiving the money in silver. They had it done up in twenty-dollar packages and had it lying in a sack. They told me to pick it up and take it over to the bank and I thought I could, but when I tried to lift it, I couldn't lift it at all. It was noon and time to go to dinner and they left that money lying on the floor till they came back from lunch. Then they took it over to the bank and had it changed to gold and that bundle wasn't light, I can tell you. After we got that price for our wool, it was the first time we had ever been able to buy a wagon.

"When I was growing up, I was so bashful I was afraid to look at a girl. Taking a man's place at the ranch didn't help me in the girls' presence. One day, my father sent me over to a neighboring ranch to buy some buck sheep. I didn't know they had a boarding house for girls till I got there and I wouldn't go in where they were, but set out on the porch and looked through the window. It sure was a pretty sight. I'd never seen such a pretty table

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or so many pretty girls. When they came out on the porch, they discovered me and began talking baby-talk to me. I nearly died of embarrassment. They called me 'honey' and asked me why I was so scared. They said they wouldn't let any of those old bad 'dirls' 3 kiss me. After they finally went on out of the yard and across the street, I managed to get my legs to take me into the dining-room to eat a few bites and as soon as the Negroes got the bucks up, I bought them and got away from there.

"I was about 23 years old when I came to Uvalde. It was in '81. I drove something like two-thousand head of sheep through the country and went on west of Uvalde to the Murlo (Muela — Moo-a-la) settlement where I stayed about a year. I built a little jaeal (ha-eal) over on the Chieon west of the 'Murlo' and lived there while I had my sheep there.

"There is where I cast my first vote. I voted for Cleveland and he turned right around and ruined the sheep business. I was really glad later on, because I went into the cattle business then and made more money out of them than sheep.

"Old Man John Fenley and his wife kept the post-office and a store and inn there on the 'Murlo.' When the mail came in on the stage coach, every fellow dived in and got his own mail. There were three Fenley sons living there, too, they were Joel, Demp and Jim. Joel had the best horses I ever saw — seemed like a thousand head and he raised lots of good mules too. There was one thing I did like and that was good horses. But the prettiest thing on Joel's ranch was his daughter, Laura. She was the prettiest woman I ever saw but she was surely a flirt. I went to see her but she married Jim Langford, a cowboy on another ranch.

"After I sold out on the 'Murlo' I moved down to Wilderness Lake below there. I leased up about 3,500 acres that extended down to the Cross S. I could have bought all that land at my own price then but it looke looked foolish to invest in land those days when range was free. It was a fine / country and the land was good. I had some good horses while I ranched there and I rode 'em too. I'd like to be back there now.

"I was married to Miss Laura White in 1892. She passed away in 1902 leaving me with five small children, Rosalie, Maude, Howard, Tom and Bowman. In 1907, I was married to Miss Eula King of Dallas. She is the mother of Bart and Jack, my two youngest boys.

"After I moved to town I still invested in the cattle buisness. I began to take an active interest in the loan buisness in town so I gradually got away from the ranch. If we'd had telephones and cars in those old days like we do now, we'd surely have made the money, but we had to go horseback then and it took a long time to make the rounds.

"In 1915 I was named President of the First State Bank of Uvalde. It is not in existence now but I have kept up the loan buisness all along. The money I made on cattle is still intact but I keep it loaned out all the time.

"I have been in bed now for about three years but I have a telephone here beside me and I see so many of my old friends who drop in to see me, that I don't mind so much. However, when spring opens up and I get through shedding, I'm going to get up."